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THE CATHCART FAMILY

A Family Account of 100 Years
Of American History

by Marvin R. Cain

EAST LANSING

1962

THE JOURNAL OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE

AND ITS ALLIED SCIENCES

Volume 100
Part 1
January 1997

ISSN 0954-6820

Published by Taylor & Francis

PUBLICATIONS OF THE MUSEUM, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
CULTURAL SERIES

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Editorial Committee: Moreau S. Maxwell, Chairman, Rollin H. Baker,
J. Allan Beegle, Harry J. Brown, Marvin R. Cain

Volume 1, Number 2, pages 133-160

Published 10 August 1962

Price \$0.75

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THE CATHCART FAMILY

A Family Account of 100 Years

Of American History¹

Introduction

In the lives of the Cathcart family one may follow a narrative of events from the American Revolution to the end of Reconstruction. No great effort has been made by the writer to relate these family experiences to accepted historical interpretations of either the period or the people. Instead, an attempt has been made throughout the narrative to let the Cathcarts speak for themselves, or to describe the events as they experienced them.

The writer is indebted to the trustees of the Michigan State University Development Fund which provided a research grant for this project, and to Mr. and Mrs. Fred Warren whose donation of manuscript materials made this study possible. The suggestions of the editorial committee of the Michigan State University Museum Cultural Series were of much help, as were the comments of Professor Gilman Ostrander, of the Department of History. Also the writer would like to acknowledge the assistance of the staffs of the La Porte Indiana Historical Society, the William Henry Smith Memorial Library of the Indiana Historical Society and the Lilly Library, Indiana University. Finally, the writer wishes to thank Mrs. Florence Cathcart of Evanston, Illinois, for kindly supplying general information about her family.

I

In 1833, discouraged and impoverished, James Leander Cathcart penned a long letter to his son Charles on the Indiana frontier. In detail, he described his past life, which had spanned over sixty years, and vividly outlined the early days of the Federal Republic. The old man depicted his own experiences against the background of the growth of this young country. Thus, James Leander Cathcart began the story of the Cathcart family, which may be told in three stages lasting from the American Revolution through the days of Reconstruction.

Born in Ireland in 1765, James Leander Cathcart migrated with his family to Philadelphia at the age of three. Here in the city which

1. Contribution, in part, from the Department of History, Michigan State University

was to see the birth of a new nation, Cathcart spent his childhood. Enamored of the colonists' cause in the American Revolution, the young man enlisted as a midshipman aboard a Massachusetts sloop of war.¹ In 1779, when the British fleet destroyed his ship off the Scottish coast, Cathcart was left to make his way to Spain where he boarded a vessel bound for America. Ill-fortune befell him again as he was captured by the British, who held him prisoner of war until his escape in March, 1782.² Free, the young sailor set out to sea once more and soon was on a merchantman bound for Mediterranean waters. Misfortune waited for Cathcart a third time, however. Off the North African coast, in 1785, his ship was seized by the Algerian pirates and the young Cathcart began another and much longer period of captivity.³

After years of diplomatic bargaining, Cathcart gained his freedom in 1796. He soon discovered that his days of enslavement had produced one fortunate result; the United States government desired his services in negotiating a peace treaty with Tunis. Weary of paying tribute to the Barbary pirates, the United States had constructed a small naval fleet, which was the nucleus of the American Navy, and had set out to obtain treaties reducing tribute payments to the sea marauders. Cathcart was asked by his government to undertake the negotiation of a peace treaty with the obdurate Dey of Tunis whom he had served when a captive.⁴ In a short time, he proved himself adept at diplomacy. He signed a peace treaty with Tunis and provided for the release of several American prisoners held by the pirates. His diplomatic toil apparently over, the impulsive young man, who had irritated his immediate superiors because of his aggressive methods, returned to the United States and a dinner at the home of President George Washington who commended his efforts.⁵

In January, 1799, Cathcart sailed for the Mediterranean with a commission as resident consul to Tripoli, and a new bride, the former Jane B. Woodside of Philadelphia. Years of imprisonment had embittered the Revolutionary patriot and steeled his determination to resist the tribute demands of the Barbary states. In 1800, he joined

1. James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Apr. 16, 1833, Charles Cathcart Mss., The Museum, Michigan State University. Hereafter referred to as Cathcart Mss.

2. Account of Services, James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Apr. 16, 1833, Cathcart Mss. Hereafter referred to as James L. Cathcart's Account of Services.

3. James L. Cathcart's Account of Services, Cathcart Mss.; Louis B. Wright and Julia H. Macleod, *The First Americans in North Africa: William Eaton's Struggle for a Vigorous Policy against the Barbary Pirates, 1799-1805* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1945), 18.

4. Joel Barlow to Timothy Pickering, May 4, 1796. Dudley W. Knox (ed.), *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Pirates* (Washington, 1939), I, 154-155; Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776-1816* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1931), 16-17.

5. James L. Cathcart's Account of Services, Cathcart Mss. The United States eventually settled for the sum of \$107,000 with Tunis.

fellow diplomat William Eaton in Tunis for new negotiations with the Tunisians concerning the revision of the standing treaty. These conferences proved successful, but Cathcart, aggressive to the point of insult, angered both Eaton and the Dey, who threatened his life.⁶ Undaunted, he returned to Tripoli and there reached an agreement with the Tripolitans regarding the seizure of American vessels. While serving as consul he intrigued with a group of Tripolitans against the Pasha. In 1801, when Tripoli declared war on the United States, Cathcart was forced to give up his consulship and flee with his family to Leghorn, Italy.

For the next fifteen years, he engaged in numerous activities, first as a private commercial agent in Leghorn and then as an unofficial emissary in the Mediterranean.⁷ As he later explained: "I remained in Tripoli until May 1801 when that faithless Pashaw having declared war against the U.S. I proceeded to Malta & Leghorn to alarm our commerce; went several times after our vessels of war arrived, off Tunis, Tripoli, & Algiers, in time all around the Mediterranean with our different Commodores procured a loan of gun and Mortar boats from the King of Naples, which went with Coml. Preble against Tripoli, procured presents of Jewelry for the Dey of Algiers and having been appointed to negotiate with Tunis repaired there, & settled our affairs . . ." Also he bought the freedom of American prisoners, outfitted them in clothing and arranged for their passage home.⁸ For these services he demanded compensation from the government while he angrily denied that he was making a profit.⁹

Severe criticism forced him to leave Leghorn and return to the United States in 1805. Piqued at the State Department, he submitted additional claims and insisted on compensation for his services as interpreter and traveling companion to Mellimelni, the Tunisian Ambassador. Claiming that he had not received enough money for his efforts, he demanded a new governmental assignment and was given the post of consul to the Island of Madeira.¹⁰ The ex-sailor stayed at Madeira with his growing family during the War of 1812, occasionally

6. *Ibid*; Pickering to Cathcart, Dec. 24, 1798, Knox (ed.), *Naval Documents* I.285-286; Charles O. Paullin, *Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers, 1778-1833* (Baltimore, 1912), 57. The treaty was ratified by the Senate in 1800.

7. Madison to Cathcart, Apr. 18, 1802, Knox (ed.), *Naval Documents*, II, 126-128; James L. Cathcart's Account of Services, Cathcart Mss. Actually Cathcart was empowered to pay \$20,000 to the Pasha and arrange for an annual payment after that.

8. James L. Cathcart's Account of Services, Cathcart Mss; Tobias Lear to Captain William Bainbridge, Feb. 12, 1804, Madison to Cathcart, June 10, 1804, Knox (ed.), *Naval Documents*, III, 404; Irwin, *United States and Barbary Powers*, 120-121, 125, 129. Cathcart recollected that he had resigned because of inadequate salary.

9. Cathcart to Captain Edward Preble, June 11, 1804, Knox (ed.), *Naval Documents*, IV, 177.

10. James L. Cathcart's Account of Services, James Leander Cathcart to John Tipton, Apr. 8, 1836, Cathcart Mss; Wright and Macleod, *First Americans in North Africa*, 200; Irwin, *United States and Barbary Powers*, 165-166.

arranging for the transfer of American prisoners of war from British ships onto vessels bound for the United States. For this service Cathcart thought that he should be rewarded an additional fee, but after a brief visit to the United States in 1815, he settled for a new consulship in Cadiz, Spain.¹¹

In 1818, Cathcart brought his family back to the United States where he encountered ill fortune. Attracted by the opportunities on the advancing frontier, the experienced seafarer found employment as a naval agent in Louisiana. By 1821, however, he wearied of his long absence from his family and returned to Washington where he was unable to obtain a position. He angrily blamed President James Monroe for his plight. Monroe had been Minister to France when Cathcart was negotiating with the Dey of Tripoli, and, contrary to Monroe's recommendations, had advised that the French offer of mediation between the United States and the Barbary powers be rejected. Cathcart was convinced that Monroe had never forgiven him and therefore had ordered his involuntary retirement.¹² Frantically he appealed to former chiefs of state, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, to help him find employment.¹³ Both of these ex-Presidents and John Quincy Adams, Monroe's Secretary of State, posted sympathetic letters to their former agent, who despairingly noted at the bottom of their letters,

"... the accompanying recommendations is [sic] evidence of my services & that they have met the approbation of every administration from government since it commenced, yet, I am left in my old age with a family of ten children unprovided for, notwithstanding that I am master of the French, Spanish, Portuguese, & Italian languages, God's will be done!!!"¹⁴

In 1825 Cathcart managed to obtain a clerkship in the Treasury Department at \$1,100 a year. In 1831 he was promoted to the position of Bookkeeper of Requisitions responsible for preparing annual reports to Congress relating to naval expenditures. Burdened by his large family of ten children, he continued to petition Congress for his two claims of \$1,296 and \$7,500, respectively, but settled down to life as a career employee in the government.

As a result of his experiences, James Leander Cathcart had grown embittered and suspicious of the politics of the age into which he

11. James Leander Cathcart to Isaac Hill, Apr. 9, 1836, Cathcart Mss.

12. James L. Cathcart's Account of Services, *Ibid.*

13. Thomas Jefferson to James Leander Cathcart (copy), Sept. 10, 1821; James Madison to James Leander Cathcart (copy), Sept. 23, 1821, Cathcart Mss.

14. John Quincy Adams to James Leander Cathcart (copy), Mar. 25, 1822, Cathcart's note, *Ibid.*

had passed. It seemed to the old revolutionist that changes had come too rapidly; the country protected young industries with a high tariff, and financially nurtured all types of enterprises with a national bank. The nation's population moved along a west-bound national road, and new people, new communities and new industries reshaped the simpler society of Cathcart's Revolutionary America. In time he too made the transition from his old Federalist outlook to a newer materialistic interpretation of society. In the swift growth of the republic, he saw opportunities for a new class of the privileged few, which would be protected by a puerile government whose representatives sought only a convenient understanding with the new sources of power—the masses.

Thus, the elder Cathcart urged his young sons, Charles, James, Henry and John to migrate westward to seek their personal fortunes. He wrote Charles and James later, offering them advice by pontifically referring them to "my letters of the state of the family, & to the Papers which they carry for the public transactions of the government during the last most important session of Congress, . . . the speeches on Nullification, Tariff, Land arrangements, & Bank which are very important, I will show you the state of politics which will be pursued at the next session and enable you to steer your political course, accordingly—and let me recommend to you in the strongest manner to take a station at once amongst the free men of your state, & be assured in a year or two you will become a leader amongst them, if you follow the advice I have given you, & will give you in my letters, but you & James must not be timid nor careless, nor hide your talents under a Basket, but make yourselves [sic] conspicuous, you have a stake in the state, and have a right to speak, & to to be heard too, which we in this disfranchised district [Washington, D.C.] have not, you stand a much better chance to get any situation under the general government either here, or in your state, than I do, for all my services for more than fifty years, because you have the Senators & Representatives to espouse your cause, for in your State, they want your influence & votes at an election and it is their interest to cultivate your esteem & favorable political opinion at least, as much as it is yours to cultivate theirs . . .".¹⁵

In 1830, Charles Cathcart decided to move westward to find security on the frontier. His unusual childhood abroad, on the island of Madeira and in Cadiz, had prepared him well for his future experiences. He could recall vividly how he had watched with boyish fascination the embarkation of General Edward Pakenham's Waterloo

15. James L. Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Apr. 15, 1833. *Ibid.*

veterans as they prepared to sail from Madeira for America and their ill-fated rendezvous with Andrew Jackson's militia in the swamps around New Orleans. He remembered also the return to the United States in 1814 when he saw, as did Francis Scott Key, the lone American flag over Fort McHenry, and passed through the city of Washington in ruins after the British troops had burned it.¹⁶ After the war the young man had followed in the footsteps of his father and for a short time sailed the Atlantic as a merchant seaman. But he returned to his family in Washington and, with the help of his father, obtained a clerkship in the Land Office. Now he struck out for the Northwest in search of new adventure which he hoped would bring him both fame and fortune.

After an arduous journey from Washington via Pittsburg, Charles arrived at Robert Dale Owen's communal settlement at New Harmony, Indiana. For three weeks he enjoyed his stay among the utopian-minded people of this community. As did other restless migrants, however, he felt the urge to continue his journey westward. From New Harmony, he struck out along the Wabash River and followed it to Logansport, then turned northward towards the fertile St. Joseph Valley and the small village of South Bend. Here, as he described later, Cathcart "first became acquainted with the large hearted, honest, and unsophisticated Hoosiers."¹⁷ After a brief sojourn in South Bend, the young traveller moved northward into the Michigan Territory and settled in Niles where he found employment as a carpenter. Industiously he set about to make and save money in order to buy land in the St. Joseph Valley.¹⁸

The vicissitudes of the frontier momentarily delayed young Cathcart's plans. After purchasing land near La Porte, Indiana, he enlisted as a volunteer soldier to fight Black Hawk's Indian band which had taken the warpath to recover former tribal lands. He accompanied a relief expedition to Fort Dearborn (near Chicago), then thought to be seriously threatened by the Indians. At the fort in July, 1832, he witnessed the arrival of Federal troops under the command of General Winfield Scott, and watched horror-struck, as the bodies of cholera victims among the soldiers, thrown over-board into Lake Michigan, washed upon the shore. Scott, delayed by the epidemic in coming to the fort's relief, had to move southward immediately, although the

16. Charles Cathcart's *Pioneer Sketches and Reminiscences*, La Porte Historical Society, La Porte, Indiana. Hereafter referred to as *Cathcart Reminiscences*.

17. *Ibid*; Milo M. Quaife, *Chicago and the Old Northwest, 1673-1835* (Chicago, 1913), 327-330.

18. *Cathcart Reminiscences*.

cholera proved to be a more formidable foe than the Indians. Still unnerved by his experiences at Fort Dearborn, Charles was ordered home. Returning to Niles he passed through several of the communities, where the Indians had recently taken the warpath, and saw "some of the scenes of the atrocities committed by the Indians; the poor settlers cabins besmeared with the blood and brains of helpless babes and children . . ." ¹⁹

In 1833, Charles Cathcart purchased a tract of land in the St. Joseph Valley which he long had desired. Soon afterwards he was joined by his brothers Henry, John, and James, who had made the long journey from Washington. Together they erected a house near La Porte in New Durham Township. Here on the Door Prairie, the Cathcart brothers began farming on a small scale with a few head of Jersey cattle. In a short time, they became successful farmers in the sparsely populated community. Charles also served as Justice of the Peace in New Durham, and engaged in land speculation. His enterprise yielded more money, and he was able to purchase adjacent acreage, which he and his brothers dubbed "Cathcart's retreat." ²⁰ He also obtained part-time employment as a land surveyor and bought up a considerable amount of Michigan Road land, which had been placed on sale at La Porte for \$1.25 an acre. In little more than a year after his initial land purchase, Charles had greatly improved his economic status and was regarded as a financially secure man by his less fortunate neighbors. ²¹

Charles's investments in the Michigan Road lands proved profitable indeed over a period of time. Originally the government had obtained these lands from the Potowatomie Indians for the purpose of building a road from Lake Michigan through central Indiana to the Ohio River. The state of Indiana was authorized to sell adjoining sections at relatively low prices, and Charles Cathcart added to his holdings by continuing to purchase this land. Encouraged by his success, his brothers and his father also invested money in the lands, and staked out their interest in the future development of the region.

In 1835, however, land was growing scarce and Charles and the settlers of La Porte were confronted by the problem of the "Indian float claims." These were titles to treaty lands on the Miami Indian Reserve, which unscrupulous speculators had obtained from unsuspect-

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*; E. E. Daniels, *A 20th Century History of La Porte County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1904), 96-97; William C. Latta, *Outline History of Indiana Agriculture* (Lafayette, Ind., 1938), 94.

21. G. W. Hoffman to Charles Cathcart, June 1, 1832, James B. Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Sept. 7, 1834, Cathcart Mss; J. F. B. Luther to Jane Johnson, Nov. 4, 1888, Jane Johnson Mss, Michigan State University Museum; Logan Esarey, *History of Indiana from Its Exploration to 1922* (Dayton, Ohio, 1924), 1, 391.

ing Indians for low prices.²² Most of these lands were occupied by settlers of northern Indiana who felt that they had legitimate claims. Since Andrew Jackson's administration had failed to resolve the question of similar pre-emption cases, the greedy speculators envisioned lucrative profits from the sale of their "float claims."²³ The pioneers who had occupied and improved these lands immediately raised a general cry of indignation against this public stock-jobbing, though several of these "squatters" themselves were waiting for a boom market to sell their own holdings. As an enterprising land purchaser, Cathcart understood the sentiments of the people of the region who wished to protect their claims against those of outsiders. He agreed, therefore, to journey to Washington and present a memorial to "Old Hickory" protesting the validity of the "float claims."²⁴

In a personal interview with President Jackson, Cathcart maintained that the settler's rights should be paramount over any other consideration. He appealed to "Old Hickory's" known hostility toward great land speculators, and reminded the President that those with the "float claims" stood to profit in public sales. Jackson appeared caught between his desire to diffuse the country's sources of wealth and his fear of a Treasury surplus. Cautiously, he questioned Cathcart as to whether he had the power to suspend the sale of the Miami lands. After ascertaining that he had such authority, the fiery old President exclaimed to the delighted Cathcart, "my dear Sir, put that [the memorial] in tangible form and I will settle it in thirty minutes."²⁵ Happily, Cathcart reworded the memorial, had it notarized, and, on the next day, presented it to Jackson, who issued appropriate instructions to the Commissioner of the General Land Office.²⁶ He thus was able to return to Indiana with the Land Commissioner's notice ordering the postponement of the sale of lands on which settlers had made improvements. For the now popular Cathcart, his interview with the President signaled the beginning of a new career as one of the leaders of Andrew Jackson's party in Indiana.

As a rising Jacksonian, Cathcart recognized that the sale of land and the promotion of internal improvements would continue to hold the interest of the people in the state. Indiana in the mid-1830's was immersed in a wave of speculation in both script and bank notes which

22. Charles Cathcart Autobiographical Sketch, William H. English Collection, Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis. Hereafter referred to as Cathcart Autobiographical Sketch.

23. Roscoe C. Buley, *The Old Northwest, Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (2 vols. Indianapolis, 1950), II 148-149.

24. Cathcart Reminiscences; *American State Papers-Public Lands* (8 vols. Washington, 1860), VII, 602, 658.

25. Cathcart Autobiographical Sketch.

26. Cathcart Reminiscences.

circulated as a result of land purchases on which internal improvement projects were planned. In need of a transportation system to the markets of the East, many of the Hoosiers demanded rapid construction and improvement of facilities. Others, called "classifiers," favored a more prudent system of allocating specific funds for projects assigned a priority by the legislature. The controversy intensified with the beginning of the Wabash and Erie Canal which greatly increased land sales. Inspired by the public enthusiasm, several politicians demanded an unlimited internal improvements program which, in time, was labeled appropriately the "Mammoth Bill" by the state legislature.

Charles Cathcart opposed the "Mammoth Bill," because he believed that the proposed legislation would not benefit the Northwestern part of Indiana, since most of the canals, turnpikes and railroads were planned outside this general region.²⁷ Also he feared such a prodigious undertaking would heighten the speculative mania which had swept over the frontier, and increase the availability of easy credit on inflationary terms. His close adherence to the hard money doctrines of the Jacksonians made him oppose a financial system based on unreliable paper currency. Too, he thought that land prices would rise precipitously and that large tracts would be obtained by unscrupulous entrepreneurs. He therefore disapproved of the legislation authorizing the state to borrow \$10,000,000 for internal improvements, over half of which was to be financed by the sale of public lands.²⁸

Elected to the state senate in 1836, Cathcart actively joined those legislators who demanded stringent financial policies. He discovered, however, that the people of his own region overwhelmingly favored a vast system of internal improvements. Following the Jacksonian principle of instructing representatives, Cathcart voted for the "whole hog" system of internal improvements. To the citizens of La Porte, a Lake Erie Canal and the improvement of the Michigan City harbor as an outlet port appeared vital measures to the economic welfare of their region.²⁹

James Leander Cathcart, too, had noted the increasing demands of the Northwest for a share in the national market so long dominated by the Northeastern section of the country. He therefore urged his sons in Indiana to support measures for the building of a canal from Michigan City to Lake Erie, and a railroad from Lake Michigan to the Wabash Canal. Aroused by the opportunity for profit, the old man

27. Charles Cathcart to Michigan City Gazette, July 20, 1831 in Jasper Packard, *History of La Porte County, Indiana* (La Porte, Indiana, 1876), 71; Elbert J. Benton, *The Wabash Trade Route in the Development of the Old Northwest* (Baltimore, 1903), 41, 98-99.

28. Cathcart Reminiscences; Roy M. Robbins, "Preemption-A Frontier Triumph," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVIII (1931-1932), 342.

29. Cathcart Reminiscences.

bought several acres of the Michigan Road land, and inquired about other land along the proposed extension of the Wabash and Erie Canal.³⁰ He needed additional funds for these ventures, so he attempted to borrow \$3,000 in French francs from a group of foreign speculators who styled themselves the "Union Agency." After protracted negotiations with the group, he discovered that it was a gigantic swindle aimed at the unsuspecting investor.³¹

As the land sales reached a peak Cathcart searched the Treasury Department for additional information. He uncovered a semi-secret map tracing a projected railroad from Michigan City to Maumee Bay and excitedly wrote his sons recommending that they buy land along this route and sell it later when the prices rose. The elder Cathcart firmly believed that the venturesome speculator would realize a sizable profit.³²

In all his letters to his sons urging them to take advantage of every economic opportunity, James Leander Cathcart revealed that he viewed the Jacksonian era as one of exploitation. ". . . Vox populi," he wrote, "in these times, is Vox Dei . . . , let who will be President so long as the people are true to themselves, as a nation, we have nothing to fear, but as individuals we may be kept out of office or turned out if we do not happen to hit the right nail on the head, patriotism now is not what it was fifty years ago, it has degenerated to mere pretext to promote personal interest, it is merely a war of the In's and Out's." ³³ Therefore, the extra-legal practices of the frontier land offices or unscrupulous speculative activities in western land were but ways to "hit the right nail on the head." ". . . The administration," he observed derisively, "is adverse to land speculators in general, and favorable to actual settlers and cultivators of the soil . . ." Such a policy, Cathcart concluded, was designed to curry favor among the voters who were settling the Western areas, since most of them were small-time speculators themselves. As proper Jacksonians then, he told his sons, they should continue to buy land whenever it seemed profitable.³⁴

As a Treasury employee, James Leander Cathcart also closely watched the effects of the government's financial policies. He predicted the disbursal of the Treasury surplus which was allocated to the states on the basis of their population, and accurately estimated that Indiana would receive from \$750,000 to \$900,000. These funds, he wrote Charles, should be set aside by the Indiana legislature to build a canal from Michigan City to Maumee Bay. Consequently, he

30. James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Mar. 19, 1836, Cathcart Mss.

31. *Ibid.*, Feb. 8, Feb. 25, Mar. 3, 1836.

32. *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1836.

33. James Leander Cathcart to Charles and James, Apr. 15, 1833. *Ibid.*

34. James Leander Cathcart to Dear Sons, July 15, July 31, Dec. 5, 1836. *Ibid.*

informed his son, such monies given to the states, would increase speculation and result in the rise of land prices.³⁵ To illustrate his conviction the old man sent Charles \$6,000 in Revolutionary Bounty script with instructions to purchase additional lands before the implementation of the Specie Circular, which prohibited paper currency in such transactions. As long as the government promoted fiscal policies which led to speculation, he believed, those alert to the news should take advantage of it. Undaunted by the increase of dubious bank notes in the West, he advised each son to continue to sell and buy land, and "acquire property which is power."³⁶

James Leander Cathcart's prolix advice seemed prophetic indeed as land sales rose in La Porte County in 1836. His optimism, however, did not alter economic realities. While the construction of internal improvement projects, suspended in many of the eastern states because of economic depression, proceeded on schedule in Indiana, hard times were imminent.

Cathcart learned of impending economic disaster when Samuel Merrill, President of the Indiana State Bank, journeyed to Washington late in 1836. Merrill had come to Washington to request Secretary of the Treasury, Levi Woodbury, to cease withdrawing government funds from the state bank. The worried banker also called on Cathcart, as a courtesy to Charles, and revealed his plans and apprehensions. Thoughtlessly, Merrill told of his warning to Woodbury that Indiana would not support Martin Van Buren in the coming Presidential election unless the government stopped withdrawing funds from the state. He explained to Cathcart how specie had already been drained from Indiana's lone bank because speculators in the West, who hoarded gold and silver, had created a shortage of hard money in the East.³⁷ Dependent on their state-supported bank for capital to finance land purchases and internal improvements the citizens of Indiana were deeply concerned over the loss of government funds. To Cathcart, however, the desperate appeals made by Merrill seemed to be poor political strategy.³⁸ Financial solvency in the western state

35. James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, June 24, 1836; *Ibid*; Edward C. Bourne, *The History of the Surplus Revenue of 1837* (New York, 1885), 61. Actually Indiana received \$860,254.44 in surplus funds.

36. James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, July 7, 1836, C. A. Harris to James Leander Cathcart, July 16, 1836, James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Aug. 12, 1836, James Leander Cathcart to Dear Sons, Sept. 6, 1836, Cathcart Mss.

37. James Leander Cathcart to James Cathcart, Nov. 3, 1836. James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Nov. 9, 1836, *Ibid*; James F. D. Lanier, *Sketch of the Life of James F. D. Lanier* (New York, 1870), 13-15; Leon M. Gordon, II, "The Effects of Michigan Road Lands on Northern Indiana, 1830-1860," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLVI (1930), 383, 395.

38. Cathcart Reminiscences; Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, 1957), 612. Cathcart's personal account of his conversation with Merrill is interesting for it was not until the spring of 1837 that James F. D. Lanier made a hurried trip to Washington to urge Levi Woodbury to stop withdrawing government specie from the state bank.

did not disturb him as long as an individual profit could be realized from the sale of the land.

Jacksonian politics, the boom market in land sales, and the coming depression had varying effects on Charles Cathcart's personal fortunes. In 1837 he married the daughter of his part-time employer, John M. Lemon, who was the Receiver of Public Lands in La Porte and a loyal Jacksonian of considerable influence in local politics.³⁹ Lemon, like Cathcart, speculated in land while in office but had far less success than his son-in-law. Dogged by financial difficulties, Lemon suffered the loss of his job to a patronage-minded Democrat. Embittered, the long-time public land receiver deserted the diminishing ranks of the Jacksonians in northern Indiana. To Charles, his father-in-law's misfortune emphasized the loss of Democratic unity in the state, and revealed the dilemma of loyal party men who had fallen on evil times.⁴⁰

The decline of Jacksonian political strength in the late 1830's caused the Cathcarts to turn with new dedication to their varied pursuits of surveying, farming, and land speculating. Charles journeyed to Michigan to survey land, while John and Henry initiated extensive experiments in corn and grain crops on their La Porte farms. Also John invented improvements on farm machinery.⁴¹ Of the brothers, only James surrendered in despair to the depression and returned to Washington in 1839 to become a clerk in the General Land Office. His father had spoken to Levi Woodbury and Secretary of War Joel Poinsett, an old acquaintance from Madeira, to ask for their help in obtaining an appointment for James.⁴² Happily, James found the Land Office more to his liking than farming in Indiana, and by the end of the year, felt confident of a successful future.⁴³ His brothers in the meantime were weathering the depression and looking forward to more promising years.

In 1840 the economically depressed frontier was attracted by the rising star of Indiana's favorite son and Whig candidate for President, General William Henry Harrison. Merrill's forebodings about the Jacksonian cause in Indiana proved well founded, as specie continued to slip from the hands of western speculators, and apprehensive

39. James Whitcomb to John M. Lemon, Mar. 27, 1837, Lemon to Whitcomb, Apr. 1, 1837, Lemon to Levi Woodbury, June 6, 1837, John M. Lemon Papers, La Porte Historical Society, La Porte, Indiana; Charles Cathcart to James Cathcart, May 16, 1837, Cathcart Mss.

40. Cathcart Reminiscences; Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America*, 455.

41. Conversation with Miss Florence Cathcart, Sept. 2, 1961, Evanston, Illinois.

42. James Leander Cathcart to James Cathcart, Feb. 16, 1839; James Leander Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Feb. 5, 1839, Cathcart Mss; Conversation with Miss Cathcart, Sept. 2, 1961.

43. James to Dear Brothers, Apr. 6, 1839, James to Charles Cathcart, Aug. 1, 1839, James to Charles Cathcart, Sept. 7, 1839, James to Charles Cathcart Oct. 12, 1839, Cathcart Mss.

legislatures terminated the construction of roads and canals in the face of the growing economic panic. The Northwest turned with fury on President Martin Van Buren. Once secure and prosperous, the region now was beset by calamitous times resulting from the destruction of the national bank and the promulgation of the Specie Circular. In Harrison, the Whig Party's new candidate, the people thought they saw a savior.

James Cathcart's humorous description of the Washington "hard cider" procession for Harrison, launching the campaign of 1840, afforded much family amusement, but evidenced the wide public acclamation of the General.⁴⁴ Reluctantly, the Cathcarts had to acknowledge that the tide had turned against Jackson's party. In Indiana they saw Harrison emerge as a frontier hero to voters who had grown restive under the Jacksonian financial policies and the resultant hard times.

Contrary to the views of his sons, the elder Cathcart, now bedridden because of illness, hopefully believed that victory for Harrison would mean a much-needed restoration of republican virtues.⁴⁵ He rejoiced in Harrison's triumph, in spite of the fact that the Whig political landslide sent Charles down to defeat in Indiana, and threatened to depose James from his position in the Land Office.⁴⁶ Before the elder Cathcart had time to evaluate the consequences of the election, Harrison died in office and was succeeded by Vice-President John Tyler. As part of Harrison's generation, James Leander Cathcart too was dying. In 1843, following the death of his young son, Edward, the old seaman passed away in the seventy-eighth year of his life.⁴⁷ A phase of the family's history had come to an end.

II

The death of James Leander Cathcart created a vacuum in the family, but James quickly took over the management of family affairs. He sold his father's lots in the national capital in order to pay old debts, and proceeded to settle his father's estate. Also, he arranged to have his young brother Tom placed in the Treasury Department under Secretary John C. Spencer. Once these matters were settled, James purchased a farm in Fairfax, Virginia, and married Eliza Jane Barkley of Washington.¹ Much to the relief of the rest of the family, he ap-

44. James to Charles Cathcart, Sept. 23, 1840, *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, Mar. 25, Oct. 21, 1841.

46. *Ibid.*, James to Charles Cathcart, May 5, 1840; Cathcart Reminiscences.

47. James to Dear Brothers, Feb. 14, 1843, James to Charles Cathcart, July 7, 1843, James to Dear Brothers, Oct. 7, 1843, Cathcart Mss.

1. James Cathcart to Dear Brothers, Nov. 11, 1843, Feb. 11, 1844, Cathcart Mss.

peared to have assumed the responsibilities as family head in Washington.

While James was fitting himself into his father's role, Charles Cathcart was engaged in the enthusiastic reorganization of the Democratic Party in Indiana. In 1843 the sweeping victories of Jacksonians James Whitcomb and Edward A. Hannegan as Governor and Senator, respectively, signified the degree of Democratic success. In helping to advance party fortunes once again, Charles discovered that the old issue of internal improvements was still a popular cause in the Northwest. As did his political tutor, Senator Hannegan, Cathcart learned that the compelling new interest of the market-hungry and nationalistic Hoosiers, was the dream of a Pacific Empire and the general mystique of Manifest Destiny.²

In reward for his party efforts, Charles received the Democratic nomination as congressional candidate for Indiana's Ninth District. Immediately, in the spring of 1844, he called for an extension of the American boundary in the Pacific Northwest to the 54°40' parallel either by negotiation or by physical expansion. Involved in such a program was the danger of war with Great Britain, but the people of Indiana thought the desirability of an empire in the Northwest far outweighed all other considerations. Even Southern hopes for the annexation of Texas and new slave territories did not prevent Cathcart from using Manifest Destiny as his campaign keynote. He could have won the election on this issue alone, but he did not neglect to publicize his stand on the pre-emption rights of white settlers on the Miami Indian Reserve. His wisely chosen political course won him a Congressional seat in 1844 at a crucial time in the territorial expansion of the United States, when both enthusiastic nationalism and the ominous cloud of militant sectionalism followed the dream of American empire.³

In 1845 the new Congressman journeyed to Washington. Once there he was not formally introduced into Washington society until he attended the President's New Year's Day dinner on January 1, 1846. Here Cathcart met President James K. Polk and his wife amidst a host of ostentatious socialites who made him feel very ill at ease. He was not able to relax socially until he dropped in on a party, held in a saloon, in honor of Secretary of State James Buchanan. In the dimly-lighted saloon he found circumstances much more amusing. He par-

2. Cathcart Reminiscences; Esarey, *History of Indiana*, 1, 530, 535-536, 539. Cathcart's campaign, contrary to the national one, was based on the Oregon boundary and not Texas annexation. See Edwin A. Miles, "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight"—An American Political Legend," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, LXIV (1957-1958), 296-297.

3. Cathcart Reminiscences; Roger H. Van Bolt, "The Indiana Scene in the 1840's," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLVII (1951), 350-351.

ticularly enjoyed watching new members of Congress as they "dodged and darted like frightened rabbits" when they were announced at the door.⁴

More serious matters soon were at hand for Cathcart, including the controversial Oregon question.⁵ In February, Cathcart delivered his maiden speech in the House on the proposed resolution which called for termination of American-British joint occupation of the Oregon territory. In a well-prepared address, he demanded a Northwest empire on the Pacific, and denounced the acquisition of Texas as a surrender to slavery. In sweeping rhetoric reserved for such occasions, he remonstrated with his Whig opponents for their "masterly inactivity" in the course of American expansionism, and contrasted their irresoluteness to the sentiments of his own Indiana constituents. "Let the bugle blast break upon our ears," he thundered, "and from the mountain side and valley's depth, prairie and wood, as if touched by the hand of magic, you will see the true sons of Columbia springing responsive to their country's call."⁶ Cathcart was referring, however, to those seeking the resource-rich territories of the Northwest and not to the swelling roar of slavery annexationists demanding a war over Texas. American ambitions on the Pacific would not be hindered by Great Britain on the Columbia River line, he asserted, nor would the acquisition of Oregon raise the controversial slavery question.⁷ He thought as did Hannegan, the 54°40' campaign slogan a definite party commitment.⁸ In spite of his oratory, however, Cathcart knew that groups in Congress already were compromising on the Oregon boundary at the 49th parallel, and that the Texas question had been decided in favor of the war-minded annexationists.

Congressman Cathcart did not neglect local issues while participating in matters of national concern. He particularly devoted much time to the Miami land claims. Early in the session he introduced a bill which allowed settlers on the Miami Reserve to purchase the land which they occupied for \$2.00 an acre before it was offered up for public sale.⁹ As the session wore on, he proposed a modified version of the original bill which provided for the reduction of the price to \$1.25 an acre. In 1847 he guided a bill through Congress which gave

4. Charles to Josephine Cathcart, Jan. 24, 1846, Cathcart Mss.

5. Charles to Josephine Cathcart, Nov. 28, 1845; *Ibid*; *Congressional Globe*, 1st Sess., 29th Congress (Washington, 1846), XV, 84.

6. *Speech of Charles Cathcart on the Oregon Question in the House of Representatives, Feb. 6, 1846* (Washington, 1846), Cathcart Mss.

7. Charles to Josephine Cathcart, Feb. 20, Feb. 22, 1846, John B. Wilson to Charles Cathcart, Feb. 27, 1846, Cathcart Mss.

8. Milo M. Quaife (ed.), *The Diary of James K. Polk*. (4 vols., Chicago, 1910), I, 271-272; Miles, "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLIV, 303, 309.

9. *Congressional Globe*, 1st Sess., 29th Congress, XV, 498, 755.

the Miami land claimants time to clear their titles.¹⁰ Since the General Land Commissioner had been acting on instructions from the President to sell all the Miami lands for Federal revenue, Cathcart and many of his constituents felt that he had scored a notable triumph in obtaining a postponement.¹¹

Congressman Cathcart also entered the legislative fray over the controversial Rivers and Harbors Bill, which included an appropriation for the improvement of the harbor at Michigan City. After the bill successfully passed the House in July, 1846, it fell victim to Polk's blanket veto, an action which incensed the people of the Northwest and enraged Cathcart.¹² Along with numerous Democrats and Whigs from the lakes region and upper West, he voted to override the President's veto. When this countermeasure failed, Cathcart joined fellow Congressmen, Abraham Lincoln among them, in preparing a new internal improvements bill.¹³ On the occasion of the 1847 Chicago Rivers and Harbors Convention, to which La Porte County was sending 110 delegates, he again addressed the House on transportation facilities in the lakes region.¹⁴ In this speech he bitterly attacked the President's opposition to internal improvements legislation and called for a new national policy.

On the issue of the Mexican War, Cathcart rallied to the Administration as did most of the Northwest representatives. Spurning a war over Texas, he nevertheless voted for the war bill presented to Congress in May, 1846. He had grave doubts over the dispatch of General Zachary Taylor to the disputed territory between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers but felt compelled to support Polk's action. To clarify his position, however, Cathcart endorsed the Massachusetts' Resolutions which declared Texas annexation to be the chief cause of an unnecessary war.¹⁵ In common with many northern Democrats, he spoke out against the pro-slavery interests while avidly supporting territorial expansion in the Far West. To Cathcart, Manifest Destiny no longer had its magnetic appeal, particularly since the South stood to gain the most by the war with Mexico.¹⁶

10. Cathcart Autobiographical Sketch, English Collection.

11. *Congressional Globe*, 2nd Sess., (Washington, 1847), XVI, 139; Jesse D. Bright to Cathcart, June 21, 1847, Roland Young to Cathcart, June 25, July 13, 1847, Cathcart Mss; Quaife (ed.), *Polk Diary*, II, 450.

12. Cathcart Reminiscences; Charles to Josephine Cathcart, July 24, 1846, Cathcart Mss.

13. *Congressional Globe*, 1st Sess., 29th Congress, XV, 1189.

14. Charles to Josephine Cathcart, Feb. 27, 1847, Cathcart Mss; Roger H. Van Bolt, "Hoosiers and the Western Program, 1844-1848," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLVIII (1952), 263-273.

15. Thomas Jerngan to Charles Cathcart, June 21, 1846, Cathcart Mss; Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico* (2 vols., New York, 1919), I, 189.

16. Charles Cathcart Diary, La Porte Historical Society, La Porte, Indiana; Charles to Josephine Cathcart, July 10, 1846, Cathcart Mss; Smith, *War with Mexico*, II, 269.

Another Congressman, David Wilmot of Pennsylvania, shared Cathcart's fears concerning territory acquired from Mexico and proposed an amendment to Polk's appropriation bill of \$2,000,000 for treaty negotiation with Mexico. Wilmot's Proviso, as the amendment was called, stipulated that slavery would not be permitted in any territories taken from Mexico. In introducing the amendment Wilmot naturally touched off the latent hostility between the Southern and Northern Democratic wings in Congress, and turned the country's attention to an unpleasant aspect of Manifest Destiny. Years later, Cathcart recollected that Jacob Brinkerhoff, a freesoil Democrat from Ohio, had authored the controversial Proviso which Wilmot presented to his colleagues, but, in 1846, it made little difference who had drafted the amendment. Only the general question of slavery extension seemed important.¹⁷

If the Wilmot Proviso vote was a harbinger of Democratic discontent, a bill extending the slavery prohibiting Ordinance of 1787 to the Oregon Territory was further proof of the ominous sectional feeling in Congress. In a reply to this freesoil proposal, Senator Jesse D. Bright of Indiana offered a counter-measure in June, 1847. Bright introduced a bill which provided for the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific thus allowing slavery to expand in the Southern half of the United States. Immediately the Northern representatives reacted by drafting a territorial bill which would prohibit slavery in Oregon.¹⁸

In the midst of the sectional crisis over slavery, Cathcart returned to Indiana for his second Congressional campaign. Happily he discovered that his constituents applauded his fight for the Rivers and Harbors Bill, and his support of the Wilmot Proviso during the debates of the 1846-7 session. In addition, he found universal approval of his opposition to a commission for Thomas Hart Benton as commander of the American armies in Mexico. The citizens of the Northwest still remembered the Missourian's frequent and insulting attacks on those who advocated the 54°40' boundary.¹⁹ Cathcart learned too that many of the settlers were wildly enthusiastic about his pre-emption bill. The sum total of his popular support, which proved too formidable for his Whig opponents, in many ways was contrary to the policies of the Polk Administration.²⁰

17. Cathcart Reminiscences; Richard R. Stenberg, "The Motivation of the Wilmot Proviso," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XVIII (1931-1932), 535. The writer casts serious doubts on Brinkerhoff's authorship of the Wilmot Proviso.

18. Quaife (ed.), *Polk's Diary*, III 501-502.

19. Charles Cathcart's Diary, Cathcart Reminiscences.

20. *La Porte Whig*, Apr. 14, 1847, La Porte County Library, La Porte, Indiana.

After a short rest following the campaign, Cathcart began the return trip to Washington in late 1847. On the way he stopped at the Burnett House in Cincinnati for two weeks. Here he visited with Congressman Abraham Lincoln and his family also making their way to Washington. He found Lincoln interesting and the two men talked at length during their stay in the Ohio River city.²¹ Soon after his arrival in Washington, Cathcart associated with other men who soon would reach the heights of fame. He rented a room in the boarding house where Senator Andrew Johnson of Tennessee lived and in a short time formed a lasting friendship with the future President. He particularly admired Johnson's views on "Squatter democracy" and his Homestead Bill. Also, Cathcart developed a fondness for the sonorous Daniel Webster of Massachusetts who for years had captivated audiences in Washington. The Indiana Congressman took advantage of every opportunity to hear the famous Senator.²²

In the debates in the House, Cathcart particularly respected the ex-President of the United States, and Congressman from Massachusetts, John Quincy Adams. Gleefully he related how "Old Man Eloquent" supported the Democratic opposition to Benton's commission, and wrote glowingly of his position in favor of the 54°40' boundary. Grief-stricken he watched, from only a few feet away, Adams suffer his paralytic stroke in Congress on February 22, 1848, as debates over a peace treaty with Mexico raged around him. Cathcart accompanied the group which carried the old Unionist out of the House, and years afterward maintained that Adams passed on without recovering consciousness to utter the immortal words imputed to him, "This is the last of earth . . ." ²³

In addition to meeting the prominent leaders in his second term in Congress, Cathcart devoted much of his time to the war issues and the problem of governing the territories acquired from Mexico. In debates over these issues the representatives of the various sections moved inexorably to a clash over slavery. Bright's bill extending the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific was endorsed by Polk, but this did not settle the problem of territorial governments in New Mexico and California. In spite of the President's position, Cathcart and other Northwest representatives remained firm in their opposition to the extension of slavery.²⁴

21. Cathcart Reminiscences.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (New York, 1956), 536-537. One other contemporary witness, William A. Newell of New Jersey also related that Adams did not speak after he collapsed. Adams had just voted against a resolution congratulating the victorious Mexican War generals.

24. *Congressional Globe*, 1st Sess., 30th Congress, XVII, 39, 1027, 1062.

However firm he was on the slavery issue, Cathcart did not abandon the Administration during the course of the war. Ironically his swan song in Congress was in defense of the Polk Administration and the general war aims as stated by the Democratic Party. On August 18, 1848, he delivered to a packed chamber a long emotional philippic, on the causes and consequences of the Mexican War. He opened his speech by arguing that the growing pressure of inevitable western migration and the political irresponsibility of Mexico had caused the war. The war, he stated, did have a strict constitutional basis aimed at "Territorial indemnity and a treaty of peace."²⁵ The Whig contention that the war was wrong seemed ludicrous, Cathcart pointed out, when one considered that they supported Zachary Taylor for President. Taylor's nomination he predicted, meant the end of the Whig Party for it had been reduced to selecting as a Presidential candidate a general who fought the war which the party condemned. Most of the people, he believed, knew that the country had to expand into the territory rightfully taken from Mexico. Since the Whigs took the position that territory conquered from Mexico must be returned, he concluded, they stood against the best interests of the country.²⁶

Cathcart wanted to prevent a growth of a bitter sectional hostility over slavery extension. He feared the growth of "ruthless power," both North and South, unless the country could be unified on the war issues.²⁷ Weary, however, of endless debates on slavery and Manifest Destiny, he decided against running for Congress again. After clearing up his affairs in Washington early in 1849, he departed for his beloved home state convinced that he was leaving public life forever.

While Charles served in Congress, Henry and James Cathcart ventured into new areas. Henry migrated southward and purchased a modest claim near Dallas, Texas, where he began raising cattle. News of gold discoveries in California lured James away from the security of his government job, and the Washington head of the family set out for the Far West to make his fortune.²⁸ Thomas, youngest of James Leander Cathcart's surviving sons, remained as a clerk in the Treasury Department, and continued the family tradition of government service.²⁹ In time, James returned to his old post in Washington,

25. *Ibid.*, 826-827, 829.

26. *Ibid.*, 829-830.

27. Charles to Josephine Cathcart, Feb. 1, 1849, Cathcart Mss.

28. Henry Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Sept. 9, 1849, James Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Oct. 31, 1849, *Ibid.*

29. John B. Lemon to Jane B. Cathcart, Feb. 30, 1850, Thomas Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, June 11, 1852, *Ibid.*

and Henry returned to New Durham Township to resume his life as an Indiana farmer.

The Cathcarts continued to rise in position in the community despite their unorthodox religious beliefs. Faced with the unrelenting hardships of the frontier, the western Cathcarts had turned to Spiritualism in much the same manner that others turned to liquor, religion, or reform. In New Harmony, years before, Charles had been exposed to the religious mysticism of Robert Owen. Owen's "Declaration of Mental Independence," pronounced at New Harmony only a few years before Cathcart arrived, undoubtedly appealed to the cosmopolitan young man who had never adopted a formal religion.³⁰ Charles believed simply that faith was a matter of individual choice and a conviction in the goodness and immortality of the human soul.³¹ His beliefs became the family faith, and spiritualistic sessions were often held in the homes of James and Charles. Henry chose to join the Methodist Church in New Durham but was expelled in 1859 by his more orthodox neighbors following a farcical trial over his views and his "advanced" social customs such as dancing.³²

After Charles Cathcart left Congress, his political stature in the eyes of his neighbors continued to grow. His retirement from public life lasted less than a year, for his old supporters once again urged his re-entry into politics in the early 1850's. His tenure as a politician in this period affords a penetrating look into the party rivalries in the Northwest and the trends during a decade of political chaos. He drifted more and more toward the free-soil viewpoint as the slavery issue cast its lengthening shadow across the nation. He looked with disapproval on the compromising moderation of James S. Whitcomb, and the pro-Southern opinions of Jesse D. Bright, the U.S. Senators from Indiana. Also, as did many other people of La Porte County, isolated from the main lines of canal, river, and railroad travel, he deplored the loss of political strength in the Northwest because of low rate of population growth. The Indiana state legislature usually chose its United States senators from the numerically stronger areas of central and southern Indiana. Cathcart and other citizens living in the northwestern part of the state believed it imperative to elect a senator from that section of Indiana to restore a proper political balance. When Whitcomb died suddenly in 1852, Cathcart and the La Porte region stirred. A new senator must be chosen and Cathcart appeared to be a logical candidate for northwestern Indiana.

30. Anna Stockinger, "The History of Spiritualism in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XX (1924), 281.

31. Cathcart Autobiographical Sketch, English Collection.

32. *The Weekly Herald*, Westville, Indiana, July 6, 1859, Cathcart Mss.

Actually Cathcart was corresponding with various political leaders in Indiana, including the controversial Bright, at the time of Whitcomb's death. He felt that the breach in the Indiana Democratic Party between Bright and his factional opponent, Governor Joseph A. Wright, must be closed if the party was to survive. Too, he had revived his own political interest and hoped to win favor with both Bright and Wright. By the fall of 1852 Cathcart's plan appeared to be succeeding, for both the Governor and the Senator looked on him as a competent mediator in the party's councils and a man who could unite the Democratic voting power in the northwest part of the state.³³ With Bright's approval, therefore, Governor Wright tendered Cathcart an interim appointment to fill the vacant seat in the Senate.³⁴ His old interest in political matters keen once more, La Porte's distinguished citizen accepted the post and again prepared for a career in Congress.³⁵

On December 6, 1852, Bright presented Cathcart's credentials in the Senate to launch the new Senator on a brief and undistinguished term of service. During the short period that he was in Washington, Cathcart devoted most of his time to writing key state legislators in Indiana regarding the January Senatorial election. He hoped to be elected to a full term by the state representatives, who were divided on a choice of candidates. Much to his dismay, however, Bright announced his support of Graham N. Fitch, an incumbent Congressman, and another group proposed John Pettit as a candidate.³⁶ Bright's action was a severe blow to Cathcart, and it damaged the unity of the Indiana democracy. He responded with a savage attack on Bright's faction. Cathcart hoped that the voters of northwest Indiana would check Bright by uniting with the anti-Bright groups in central and eastern Indiana.³⁷ If such a coalition were brought about, Cathcart felt that he would win in the legislature.

His hopes, however, were not to be realized. In January, 1853, the Indiana representatives met and elected John Pettit as a compromise choice. Although Cathcart regarded Pettit's election as a personal affront, he politely acknowledged defeat and promised the winner his support. Privately, he concluded that the compromise on Pettit

33. Charles Cathcart to Jesse D. Bright, Jan. 4, 1852, Cathcart to Edward H. Ellis, Nov. 13, 1852, Cathcart Mss.

34. Charles Cathcart to Ellis, Nov. 22, 1852. *Ibid.*

35. Graham N. Fitch to Charles Cathcart, Nov. 25, 1852, Charles Cathcart to Wright, Nov. 26, 1852, *Ibid.*

36. Charles Cathcart to Ellison, Nov. 26, 1852, Charles Cathcart to Wright, Dec. 8, 1852, Charles Cathcart to E. M. Chamberlain, Dec. 8, 1852, Charles Cathcart to William J. Brown, Dec. 12, 1852, *Ibid.*

37. Charles Cathcart to A. P. Richardson, Dec. 9, 1852, Charles Cathcart to William J. Brown, Jan. 1, 1853, Pettit to Charles Cathcart Feb. 6, 1853, *Ibid.*

had been caused by Bright's actions and angrily resolved never again to campaign for public office.³⁸ Throughout the 1850's he retained his party allegiance but turned his attention from political matters to business and scientific studies.³⁹ His temporary withdrawal from public life marked the end of the second stage of the Cathcart account.

III

The coming of the Civil War changed the lives of the Cathcart family as it did other families both North and South. On the eve of the conflict, the Cathcarts, as thousands of others, hoped for a peaceful compromise on the issues of slavery and secession. By 1860 old Jacksonians in La Porte were looking to Charles Cathcart for political leadership once again, since he represented their moderate sentiments on the grave national issues. In that year the Ninth District Democrats nominated him to oppose the popular Schuyler Colfax, incumbent Congressman and owner of the South Bend *Free Press*, in an attempt to break the growing strength of the sectional Republican Party. Too ill to campaign, Cathcart accepted the nomination as a follower of Stephen A. Douglas, the Presidential candidate of the Northern Democrats.

As a symbol of the old "progressive Democracy" of the Northwest, Cathcart rallied an impressive following, including many old settlers on the Miami Reserve who remembered his efforts in their behalf. However, Colfax at the head of a fusionist coalition of anti-slavery Democrats, ex-Whigs and Republicans, won the election handily.¹ In spite of Democratic strength, many voters in the state thought the Democratic position too equivocal on the controversial doctrine of popular sovereignty and the extension of slavery.² In the Presidential election also, a majority of Indiana's citizens spurned the Douglas Democracy and voted for the prairie lawyer from Illinois and Cathcart's former colleague in Congress, Abraham Lincoln.³ For the Cathcarts and the country the sectional crisis had arrived.

Another part of the Cathcart family viewed the crisis over secession of the Southern states and the coming war with a youthful wonderment separated from the impending tragic realities. In her letters

38. Pettit to Charles Cathcart, Feb. 16, 1853, Pettit to Charles Cathcart, Aug. 5, 1853, Charles Cathcart to Pettit, Aug. 22, 1853, *Ibid.*

39. Charles Cathcart to W. H. English, Dec. 21, 1854, English Collection.

1. Cathcart Reminiscences; Charles Kettleborough, "Indiana on the Eve of the Civil War," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, VI (1919), 141, 155.

2. Miami County *Sentinel*, Peru, Indiana, July 19, 1860, Cathcart Mss; Willard H. Smith, *Schuyler Colfax, The Changing Fortunes of a Political Idol* (Indianapolis, 1952), 137-138; Kettleborough, "Indiana on the Eve of the Civil War," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, VI, 155.

3. Esarey, *History of Indiana*, II, 644; Kenneth M. Stampp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War* (Indianapolis, 1949), 42, 46-47. La Porte County cast 3167 votes for Lincoln, 1503 for Douglas and 424 for Breckenridge.

from Washington, Jamie Peabody, daughter of Amelia Cathcart, Charles's sister, described the excitement in the national capital to her cousin in Indiana. "You should be here now if you love soldiers, for the city has them all around about so many blue coats I have scarcely ever seen . . .," the excited young girl wrote shortly before the firing on Fort Sumter.⁴ A few weeks later in early April, 1861, the impressionable Jamie depicted the long-awaited arrival of the Seventh Massachusetts Regiment. In the early weeks of the conflict she also reported the growing anxiety of her Uncle James and the plight of her brother John who had followed his wife and family to Virginia and secession. It is apparent that the harshness of war was not perceived by the young girl who described the troops preparing for the move southward and the beginning of four long years of struggle.⁵

After the first year of war, the Cathcarts drifted slowly from old political loyalties to the ranks of the new Republican Party. As the Republican Party was the party of the Union, political opposition to it was considered virtually an act of treason. In 1862 Charles Cathcart entered Republican affairs by campaigning actively for his former opponent and party stalwart, Schuyler Colfax. As President of the 1862 Republican-sponsored "Union County Convention" in La Porte, he endorsed such Administration measures as the confiscation of Confederate property and the emancipation of slaves belonging to Southern owners. At the end of this second year of war, John and Henry Cathcart joined Charles and aligned themselves with Lincoln's party.⁶

The fury of the war, however, essentially did not change Charles Cathcart's moderate views on the conduct and aims of the conflict, or wipe away affection for his former party. In 1862 he defended Indiana Democrats against charges of treason leveled at them by Governor Oliver P. Morton who had assumed dictatorial control of the state. Crying treason in the face of political opposition, Cathcart wrote Colfax, was not a wise policy for the Republicans even in the "heat of the war."⁷ He expressed these sentiments again when he served as Chairman of the Resolutions Committee of the Republican Convention in June, 1863. Here, he recommended that partisan politics be abandoned altogether, and that the practice of arresting "peace Democrats" be discontinued. Cathcart felt a close sympathy to the old Democracy, and its opposition to national banks, a high tariff, and federal centralization. He did not believe it should be accused

4. Cathcart Reminiscences; Jamie Peabody to Jamie B. Cathcart, Feb., 1861, Cathcart Mss.

5. Jamie E. Peabody to Jamie B. Cathcart, Apr. 30, 1861, *Ibid.*

6. La Porte Herald, Aug. 16, Sept. 13, 1862, La Porte County Library; Reminiscences of Jane B. Cathcart Johnson, July 1, 1919, Lemon Papers; Stamp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War*, 136-139.

7. Jane B. Cathcart Johnson, Reminiscences, Lemon Papers.

of being a traitorous organization for upholding these views.⁸ He did warn Democratic friends, who were learning to dread the word "Copperhead" against making inflammatory public statements regarding the war. Also, he passed along cautious advice concerning the calling of a Democratic Convention in Chicago to draft a party ticket and platform for the Presidential election of 1864.⁹ Only by pursuing a moderate course, Cathcart asserted, could the Democrats hope to prevent radical Republicans from seizing control of state politics and ending the two-party system in Indiana.¹⁰

As the war lengthened into the fourth year, Charles Cathcart sought a more vigorous enforcement of measures designed to help end the fighting. He particularly regarded the Conscription Bill as essential to a victory for the North. Passed in 1863, this draft act had provided for a system of provost marshals who supervised enrollment districts in each state. Each district had boards which maintained lists of draft-eligible citizens who could be summoned to military service. The law included, also a commutative clause permitting a person to arrange for a substitute or a payment of \$300 to avoid the draft.¹¹

As an enrollment board official in Westville, Cathcart knew of many men who had escaped the draft because of the provisions of the commutative clause. In a fascinating letter to Senator Henry S. Lane of Indiana, the Black Hawk War veteran complained bitterly about the inequities of the Conscription Act. "I suppose," he wrote, "the patriotic part of those who [are] anxious to screen copperheads from the draft, suppose we can make converts enough from their ranks to compensate for the drain upon our loyal voters—if so, they are reckoning without their host—the accursed hounds are wedded to their idols—every Union man that enters the army, gives additional impetus to their efforts to seize the government—If things go on as they have the pimps of Jeff Davis take Indiana at the next Election."¹²

He strongly urged the reluctant Senator to support draft enforcement to place all able-bodied men into military service. "This township has this winter and fall furnished 40 recruits," he related, "Two of that number being copperheads—the township is divided into two election precincts—From this precinct in which I live, there is scarce a Union man left, not one that I know fit for the service and

8. Jasper Packard, *History of La Porte County*, (La Porte, 1876), 259; Hubbard, *Older Middle West*, 209; Stamp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War*, 199, Charles Cathcart Confidential Note on back of letter, C. Carter to Cathcart, Aug. 5, 1863, Cathcart Mss.

9. Carter to Charles Cathcart, Aug. 5, 1863, *Ibid.*

10. Cathcart to C. Carter, Nov. 8, 1863; *Ibid.*; Klement, *Copperheads in the Middle West*, 198.

11. James G. Randall, *Constitutional Problems under Lincoln* (New York, 1951), 247-249.

12. Cathcart to Henry S. Lane, Feb. 4, 1864, Henry S. Lane Papers, Indiana University Library, Bloomington, Indiana.

yet but one copperhead has volunteered—at the polls the traitors out vote us three to one, and so completely cowed the Republicans, that they slip to the polls quietly and away, not opening their mouths . . .”¹³ A strict enforcement of the draft, he informed Lane, would make disloyal and passive citizens serve their country along with others.¹⁴

The Cathcarts themselves responded loyally to their Government's call for volunteers. Late in the fall of 1862, James L. Cathcart, Charles's son, enrolled in the 99th Indiana Volunteer Regiment which was mustered into service at South Bend under the provisions of the Six Regiments Act. Governor Morton commissioned the young Cathcart a lieutenant and quartermaster of the regiment which was sent to Memphis, then to Louisville, Kentucky, and finally southward in pursuit of Confederate forces.¹⁵ Convinced of the righteousness of the Union cause, James found the prosecution of the war to his liking. He was pleased especially over the confiscation of Confederate property for “. . . they [the Confederates],” he wrote, “were traitors; nothing but rebels.”¹⁶ The opinionated young officer served until the end of the war with an unshaken belief in the North's cause and an unbounded optimism regarding the ultimate victory.

James's young cousin, Will F. Peabody, also enlisted in the Union Army and he, too, registered his impressions of war. In turn, young Peabody fought the tyranny of company officers, the ennui of military life and the Confederate Cavalry. A perceptive observer, he described at length the state of morale among the soldiers with whom he served.¹⁷ His main concern was the appearance of peace sympathizers in the ranks of his battalion. Their arguments, particularly the advocacy of a Northwest Confederacy, he believed, had demoralized other soldiers and lowered their fighting efficiency. However, the “copperhead” element, Peabody assured his Uncle Charles, did not represent the main sentiment of the army.

“Most of us,” he wrote, “know that we are fighting in a great and good cause but we see a big black cloud raising [sic] in the North and we are almost afraid the good old ship will be wreck [sic] but if she does go under there are a great many men in this army [who] will stick with our flag . . . and if we could only hold the North united and stop the traitors at home those in the South will be whipped before fall.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, young Peabody did not live to see the

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*; William D. Foulke, *Life of Oliver P. Morton* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1899), I, 366, 370.

15. James L. Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Oct. 17, Nov. 6, Nov. 24, 1862, Cathcart Mss.

16. James L. Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Nov. 30, 1862, *Ibid.*

17. William F. Peabody to Charles Cathcart, Sept. 21, 1862, *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1863.

victory for which he hoped; a few days after writing the above letter, the intense young man met death on the battlefield.

After four long years of conflict, the war ended in 1865, and the Cathcart family resumed more orderly lives. James settled permanently in Washington after receiving a promotion in the Treasury Department to the position of "Supervising Inspector General of Steamboats." During the tragic years of Ulysses S. Grant's administrations, he successfully wielded political influence to advance steadily in governmental office.¹⁹ Unlike James, Thomas Cathcart resigned his government job after the war and entered the printing trade in Washington. In Indiana, during the Reconstruction years, Henry prospered as a farmer, and John perfected a windmill which was sold throughout the upper midwest.

Undaunted by old age, Charles Cathcart lived out his last years in semi-retirement, although he retained an active interest in politics. In 1866, he entered the Congressional race against the amateur historian and former Union Army general, Jasper Packard.²⁰ His defeat by a narrow margin caused him to consider running for the Senate four years later.²¹ But he had wearied of campaigning and so decided to withdraw his name from political consideration. He was after all, he reminded oldtime supporters, still "an old line Democrat taking Jefferson and Jackson as my political Exemplars."²² Two years later he did consent to journey East as a delegate to the 1872 Republican Convention in Philadelphia, but afterwards returned to a life of seclusion at "Cathcart's Retreat."²³ Here, at the peaceful farm, he spent long hours recounting experiences of former days, and counseling younger members of the family. Occasionally, he loaned money to needy relatives, and frequently corresponded with individual family members who sought his advice.²⁴ It was thus a sorrowful loss to the Cathcart family when Charles died in 1888 in the eighty-eighth year of his life.²⁵ His death ended the last phase of the family account which had spanned the period of history from the American Revolution to the end of Reconstruction.

19. Schuyler Colfax to Charles Cathcart, Nov. 30, 1864, *La Porte Herald*, July 14, 1866, Cathcart Mss.

20. *Michigan City Enterprise*, June 19, 1868; *La Porte Union and Herald*, June 20, 1868. *Ibid.*

21. *La Porte Argus*, Apr. 21, 1870, *La Porte County Library*; Petition of Citizens of La Porte to Governor Conrad Baker, Oct. 7, 1870; George L. Andrews to Governor Baker, Oct. 13, 1870, Cathcart Mss.

22. Cathcart Autobiographical Sketch.

23. Morton C. Hunter to Charles Cathcart, Feb. 22, 1872, Abram P. Andrew to Charles Cathcart, May 30, 1872, Cathcart Mss.

24. Charles Cathcart Bank balance, 1881, James L. Cathcart to Charles Cathcart, Sept. 15, 1884, *Ibid.* In 1881, Charles had \$2,758.50 in the state bank but it was a deceiving amount. He owned land in two Indiana counties, and in the state of Illinois. In addition, he had various business interests in La Porte County.

25. James M. Lemon to Jane Johnson, Sept. 9, 1883, Jane Johnson Mss.

